

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE
IN HEALTHCARE
RISK MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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Definitions

- Aggressive or Violent Conduct

“Unacceptable behavior or the misuse of power through the physical, verbal or psychological means or aggressive acts that cause another person to suffer a loss of personal security and safety.”

Definitions

■ Violent Behavior

Is typically acted out physically and includes:

- ☐ Assault
- ☐ Physical altercations (fighting)
- ☐ Throwing objects, striking objects or structures in anger or with force
- ☐ Intentionally damaging or sabotaging company property or merchandise
- ☐ Other destructive acts or violent crimes

Definitions

■ Aggressive Behavior

Is typically threatening in nature and includes:

- ☐ Harassment and intimidation
- ☐ Threats (expressed or implied)
- ☐ Hazing
- ☐ Arguing, swearing or verbal abuse
- ☐ Unreasonable refusal to cooperate with co-workers, supervisor or management
- ☐ Possession of weapons / destructive devices

Narration:

.....aggressive behavior is further identified by the receiver of such aggression as well as parties that are in the vicinity thus creating hostile work environment.

Workplace Violence Statistics

- Every year in the United States, approximately 1 million people are assaulted at work.
- Over 50% of these attacks occur in healthcare facilities.

Narration:

.....of the 50% of the attacks that occur in healthcare facilities, over three quarters occur by patients and/or patient's families, i.e., family was in crises prior to an acute healthcare event will intensify when in crises. Emergency Department extremely vulnerable as well as Critical Care waiting areas. Healthcare providers have accepted aggression by patients as part of their job description and have historically tolerate and under-reported violence in healthcare.

OSHA

Occupational Safety & Health Act

- The right to a safe and healthful workplace
 - o General duty clause

Narration:

.....every employee has the right to work in a safe violent-free work environment.

OSHA - continued

- Employer must provide a safe workplace
 - ☐ written policies
 - ☐ employee training
 - ☐ proper staffing
 - ☐ follow-up on incidents

Narration:

.....conduct a risk assessment on potential areas of vulnerability. Review incident trends as well as physical environment.

JCAHO

- ◆ enforcement of institutional policies
- ◆ access control
- ◆ crime prevention
- ◆ property protection

Verbal Abuse

Healthcare providers are verbally abused from a variety of sources:

- ◆ staff
- ◆ patients
- ◆ families of patients

Narration:

.....again, note that violence by patients has been grossly under-reported. Early recognition of potential abuse by families requires early intervention to potentially diffuse.

Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse is believed to:

- ◇ cause turnover adding cost of healthcare
- ◇ have a negative impact on patient care
- ◇ decrease staff work satisfaction
- ◇ reduced staff productivity

Definitions

- Verbal Abuse

“I don’t know how to define pornography,
but I know it when I see it.”

Oliver Wendel Holmes,
Supreme Court Justice

Definitions

■ Verbal Abuse

- ☐ conceptual; any communication that is perceived as harsh, intimidating or harmful to the recipient
- ☐ operational; any statement an individual recognizes as an attack on himself or herself or another person

Warning Signals and Red Flags for Potential Violence

- Paranoid behavior
- Delusional beliefs
- Poor self-esteem
- Observed temper control difficulties
- Argues frequently with staff, family, co-workers or supervisor.

Warning Signals and Red Flags for Potential Violence

- Sharp changes in attitude or appearance
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Specific repeated threats
- Excessive interest in media reports of violent weapons and / or fascination with the military.

Warning Signals and Red Flags for Potential Violence

- Experience anger related accidents
- History of threats with family or co-workers
- Verbal complaints of heightened stress at work or at home

Narration:

.....staff must be trained in identifying early warning signals and communication strategies to diffuse potential escalation.

Develop Policy / Procedure

- Multi-disciplinary involvement
- Risk assessment
- Control measures - prevention

Narration:

.....for multidisciplinary involvement enlist your community as well as your staff. Community (local law enforcement) as appropriate to identify potential risk. Institute control measures to limit access as well as alert mechanisms in the event of potential violence, i.e., the use of panic buttons in areas where staff are operating in remote environments.

Recommendations

- Educate

- ☐ definition of abuse
- ☐ establish guidelines to deal with abuse in conjunction with violent free workplace policies
- ☐ recording trends that precipitate abuse
- ☐ following through on abuse incidents to close them decisively and to learn from the incident
- ☐ develop a support system for staff

Recommendations - continued

- Record Keeping
- Incident Follow-up
 - ☐ duty to warn
 - ☐ internal
 - ☐ external agencies

Narration:

.....under the bullet point "Incident Follow-up, **duty to warn**", when a staff person becomes aware of a threat directed towards another individual it is their duty to warn of potential harm. "**Internal**" refers to progressive disciplinary counseling communications skills as appropriate. "**External agencies**" may be the local law enforcement to state licensing board.

Reporting Incidents – Staff Involvement

- ◆ immediate supervisor
(both verbal and written report)
- ◆ human resources representative
- ◆ EAP if available in institution
- ◆ Freedom for employees to have comfort level to report to any member of organizational management

Reporting Incidents

Patients / Visitors or Public Involvement

- Patient Representatives
- Security
- Nurse Manager / Supervisor or any member of organizational management
- Risk Management / Administrator on-call

Responding to Reports

Consult available resources ASAP
(dependent on organizational structure)

- ◆ Department Director
- ◆ Security
- ◆ Human Resources Services
- ◆ Risk Management
- ◆ Employee Assistance Program
- ◆ Mental Health

Responsibilities - Staff

- Demonstrates acceptable conduct at all times
- Report incidents of violent conduct promptly
- Beware of early signals of potentially violent behavior

Responsibilities - Management

- Beware of early warning signals
- Respond promptly to all report / complaints
- Increase conflict resolution skills
- Utilize available resources in facility and community
- Role model expected conduct

Narration:

.....responsibility of staff and management to create a culture of safety and a violent-free workplace.

Risk Management Opportunities

- Assess / evaluate policies/procedures which address violence
 - ◇ Reduce frequency
 - ◇ Reduce severity
 - ◇ Facilitate open door management policy
- Educate Staff
 - ◇ Awareness
 - ◇ Reporting strategies
- Educate management

Risk Management Opportunities – continued

- Protect environment
- Confrontation crisis management
 - ◇ how to handle
- Criminal background checks
 - ◇ DOT, DHFS, DRL

Intervention

- Engineering / Administrative Controls
 - Security
 - Law Enforcement on Premises
 - Infant Abduction
 - Bomb Threat
 - Drug Testing

Narration:

.....regarding “Engineering/
Administrative Controls” – policies/
procedures such as infant abduction,
bomb threat – need to conduct drills
to validate.

Security

- Staff training – de-escalation strategies
- Defensive training
- OC (pepper foam training)
- Level of response
- Restraints
 - Restraint type
 - Training
 - Documentation
 - Assessment
 - Law enforcement involvement
 - Communication

Narration:

.....security may involve in-house security program to train staff, de-escalation strategies, and enlisting the involvement of local law enforcement.

Security Alert

- Areas addressed
 - ☐ suspicious individuals behavior
 - ☐ disruptive / disorderly visitors
 - ☐ violent patients

Narration:

.....develop appropriate procedures for early communication and notification in the event of suspicious individuals on the premises, early notification of security or law enforcement for disruptive or disorderly visitors and rapid intervention by law enforcement in the event of a violent patient or family member. The objective is to ensure the safety and cause harm to all parties involved.

Law Enforcement On Premises

- Policies / procedures to address mandatory training
- Policies / procedures for weapons on premises
 - Psychiatric treatment facilities security
 - Emergency department security issues
 - Various state statutes prohibit presence of weapons, routine visits or patrols in psychiatric and ED environments
- Lock boxes
- Alternative interview rooms

Narration:

.....healthcare facilities many times develop policies referencing the use or presence of weapons on the campus or in at-risk areas such as Behavioral Health or Emergency Department. Such policies need the enlistment of local law enforcement in development to ensure that all parties involved understand objectives.

Infant / Child Abduction (Code Pink)

Objective:

To insure all facility personnel and outside agencies are notified appropriately with the goal to locate and to reunite the child with his/her family as quickly as possible.

Narration:

.....policies/procedures referencing infant/child abduction should not only be in the Birth Center environment. Statistics have demonstrated that Pediatrics and other areas in an acute care facility are equally vulnerable. Such policies should be consistent throughout the organization in staff education.

Infant / Child Abduction - continued

Policy should address behaviors to reduce / eliminate prospect of abduction.

- ◆ Staff education
- ◆ Family education
- ◆ ID badges
- ◆ Unit security
- ◆ Infant / children transported only in transport devices (not carried)

Infant / Child Abduction - continued

- Surveillance systems
 - ☐ active
 - ☐ passive
- Defined responsibilities in the event of an abduction
 - ☐ nursing
 - ☐ security
 - ☐ management
 - ☐ law enforcement
 - ☐ staff
 - ☐ pastoral care

Narration:

.....reminder to conduct drills as a form to validate and educate staff on policy/procedure.

Bomb Threat

- strategies for Telecommunications staff
 - ❑ policy / procedure for receiving call
 - ❑ notification of staff
 - ❑ law enforcement
 - ❑ search strategies
 - ❑ evacuation strategies

Narration:

.....in the development of a bomb threat policies, enlist communication feedback from law enforcement.

Patient Drug / Alcohol Testing

- Presenting into Emergency Department escorted by law enforcement
 - intoxicated vs incapacitated
 - compliant vs resistive

Narration:

.....individual may present to the Emergency Department for drug/alcohol screening at the request of law enforcement. Ensure that the patient has not presented for medical treatment. Develop appropriate policies/procedures to ensure compliance with EMTALA. In the event that the patient is identified as being incapacitated raises the level of responsibility for the healthcare provider. Ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to maintain staff safety in the event of requested drug/alcohol testing.

Staff Drug / Alcohol Testing

- Awareness program
- Policy / procedure identifying drug testing
 - pre-employment
 - for cause testing

Narration:

.....educate staff on the objective of drug/alcohol testing. Have clearly identified policies outlining the procedure “for cause testing”.

Facilities Security Strategies

- Safety committee involvement / input
- Access limitations – sensitive areas
- Surveillance
- Weapon detection devices
- Relationship with law enforcement

Follow-up Activities / Investigation

- Security, Risk Management, Human Resources
 - ❑ investigate how, why did incident occur
 - ❑ causes, contributing factors
(staff training, environment, etc.)
 - ❑ action taken
 - ❑ further recommendations as appropriate

Follow-up Activities / Investigation

- Law Enforcement
 - ❑ pursue charges as appropriate
 - ❑ communication lines
 - ❑ relationship building

Follow-up Activities / Investigation

- EAP and / or CISD (Employee Assistance Program and / or Critical Incident Stress Debriefing) team involvement as appropriate
 - outlet / resource for staff to communicate, to heal.

Narration:

.....the benefit of an EAP program or a staff training critical incident stress debriefing is tremendous. It further demonstrates an employer's commitment to staff's well-being.

CASE SCENARIO EXAMPLES

Bomb Threat

Scenario 1:

A large multispecialty clinic with over 2,000 employees attached to a 500 bed hospital with attached research facility and joint venture lab. Caller phones into central telecommunications at approximately 3:30 PM. “Lady, there’s a bomb in your clinic that is set to go off in approximately 45 minutes. You better get out of there. I’m not lying!” Click

Bomb Threat

- If you were the telecommunications person, what would you do?
- Who would you notify?

Narration:

.....whether your facility is a small solo-practice or a large tertiary care facility, what is the process for notification and strategies to ensure a safe environment upon notification?

Spouse Abuse

Scenario 2:

A female patient presents to the Emergency Department stating that she has been beaten by her estranged husband. "I got away...he threatened to kill me before I left."

Spouse Abuse

Outcome:

Patient's physical and emotional needs assessed. Law enforcement notified. Security notified. Patient offered safe haven. DHFS notified – patient refuses. Responds that she will go to her parent's home and leaves the ED.

Patient is brought back to the ED via ambulance 45 minutes post discharge with multiple gun shot wounds – DOA.

Spouse Abuse

- What happened?
- Were the proper steps taken?
- What more could have been done (if anything)?

Workplace Violence

Scenario 3:

Employee working in lab on weekend morning. Employee's husband enters the facility, passes check points and goes to employee's work station. A physical altercation ensues with the employee being dragged across floor. Employee's husband continues assault until security intervenes.

Workplace Violence

Outcome:

Security and management notified,
estranged husband subdued.

- Were the proper people notified?
- What could have been done to prevent this from occurring?

Facility Management has the duty to continually assess and develop strategies to reduce the severity and frequency of violence within the workplace.

Narration:

.....Thank you for participating in this education service.

If you would like a comprehensive presentation to your staff, please contact the Risk Management Hotline at 800-515-0092 and the appropriate people will be notified.